

# It's all in the Alps

From best runs to best parties, **Rachael Oakes-Ash** rates the resorts in one of Europe's finest destinations.



AUSTRIA is dotted with high-country hamlets, alpine resorts and historic towns dedicated to skiing. This land-locked country deep in the Alps has some of the world's best ski schools and is responsible for many World Cup and Olympic champions.

Resorts are linked by an extensive lift system or free bus and shuttle services so it's possible to ski at more than one resort each day. With about 600 villages, you could ski all winter but if you haven't got months to spare, here's the top five resorts for skiers, partiers, snowboarders and luxury-seekers.

## St Anton am Arlberg

**GREAT FOR** Advanced skiers and party people. This big, bad, mother of a resort chews up beginners and spits them out. The motto here is ski hard and party harder.

Black diamond skiers take on St Anton's main mountain, accessed by cable car, gondola and fast chairlifts, while the surrounding Arlberg region has 280 kilometres of groomed runs and 180 kilometres of off piste. Be warned, though, if you plan to ski off piste, take a guide as avalanche is a real possibility in Europe.

Ski-in mountain huts are dotted throughout and serve hearty Austrian fare. The Arlberghohe has a large sun deck and is known for its rum-laced hot chocolate and long lunches. If you're there in peak season, book ahead.

When it comes to apres parties, St Anton is an institution. Ski into the Krazy Kanguruh (owned by racing legend Mario Matt) and be prepared to dance on tables. The Moosewirt rivals the Kanguruh and

from 4pm daily this humble bar and restaurant turns into a den of iniquity. You have been warned. [www.stantonarlberg.com](http://www.stantonarlberg.com).

## Lech and Zurs

**GREAT FOR** Celebrity spotting. The twin resorts of Lech and Zurs are linked to St Anton and attract Fortune 500-types and European royalty. Daily lift-pass numbers are limited to ensure lift queues are kept to a minimum. The terrain is a good mix of beginner, intermediate and expert, with more than 100 kilometres of marked runs serviced by high-speed cable cars and gondolas.

If money is no object, channel your inner count and countess at Hotel Post ([www.postlech.com](http://www.postlech.com)). This former royal staging post is now an elegant family-run hotel of the finest quality. [lech-zuers.at](http://lech-zuers.at).

## St Christoph

**GREAT FOR** Boutique Tyrolean charm. This 14th-century town sits 1800 metres above sea level and character-filled alpine chalets have rustic lounges with roaring fires.

St Christoph is also linked to St Anton and offers a mere 700 beds in hotels, inns and chalets. For true fairytale-style lodgings book into the Arlberg Hospiz. Once home to mediaeval monks, the hotel has been restored, complete with underground tunnels. [hospiz.com](http://hospiz.com).

## Kitzbuhel

**GREAT FOR** Mediaeval madness, celebrity and luxury. One of the largest ski resorts in Austria and close to Innsbruck, Kitzbuhel has



World class ... tackling the snow at Zurs; above left, St Anton. Photos: Getty Images

168 kilometres of slopes serviced by 56 lifts including cable cars. Perhaps most famous for the Hahnenkamm downhill World Cup race, known as the most difficult in the world, Kitzbuhel is on every ski racer's dream map. But don't let this put you off, as the majority of Kitzbuhel's terrain is far mellower and it's worth a visit for the mediaeval mining-town charm alone.

The international jet-set descends on Kitzbuhel for World Cup races and fills the panelled rooms of the Tennerhof Hotel.

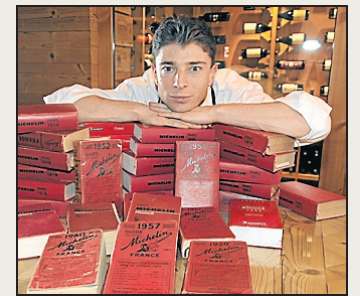
Those with lofty aspirations bed down at the castle-like Hotel Schloss Lehenberg. Strapped for cash? There are more than 10,000 hotel and chalet beds to suit all budgets. [kitzbuehel.com](http://kitzbuehel.com).

## Mayrhofen

**GREAT FOR** Snowboarders. It's home to Austria's most rated terrain park, boasts wide-open bowls and 159 kilometres of piste with 100 per cent snow-making access should Mother Nature decide to take a break.

The terrain park has its own four-seater chair lift running the length of the park. It is divided into three levels of ability with 11 kickers, two hips, 34 boxes and rails and a halfpipe.

Where there are snowboarders, there is a party: the resort hosts the annual Snowbombing music festival every April, complete with international bands. [mayrhofen.at](http://mayrhofen.at).



Young gun ... Jean Suplice.

## Stars of the dining scene

There's no need to sacrifice taste for piste when skiing in Europe. The world's toughest food critic, the Michelin Guide, has awarded stars to restaurants in the snow fields of France and Italy. Here are our top five picks.

**Les Airelles, Courchevel, France.** Celebrity chef Pierre Gagnaire is the man behind the stove, serving fine-dining fare on Hermes tableware in this two-star restaurant adorned with wood panels, crystal chandeliers and red silks. [airelles.fr](http://airelles.fr).

**L'Oxalys, Val Thorens, France.** Jean Suplice is the youngest chef in history to make the Michelin Guide. L'Oxalys sits at 2300 metres, has been awarded two coveted stars and offers afternoon cookery classes each Sunday. [restaurant-loxalys.fr](http://restaurant-loxalys.fr).

**Hameau Albert 1er, Chamonix, France.** Chef Pierre Maillot's creative menu of alpine food with a Mediterranean twist has been awarded two stars, too. Expect two-course lunch specials, degustation dinners and wine tasting events. [hameaualbert.fr](http://hameaualbert.fr).

**La Stua de Michil, Corvara, Italy.** A mere eight tables are available at this intimate Italian Alps one-star winner, at La Perla Hotel in the Dolomites. Both dinner and a bed are recommended. [hotel-laperla.it](http://hotel-laperla.it).

**Restaurant St Hubertus, San Cassiano, Italy.** Renowned chef Norbert Niederkofler uses the finest local Italian ingredients to create a two-Michelin-star menu in the Rosa Alpina Hotel and Spa's Restaurant St Hubertus. Venison, foie gras, Sicilian red shrimps, lamb osso buco and pikeperch are features. [rosaalpina.it](http://rosaalpina.it).

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